

## **Umsebenzi Online on Women, 2006 - 2009**

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**UMSEBENZI ONLINE** 

**6 August 2009**

## **Use Women's Month to intensify the struggle against patriarchy and all forms of chauvinism**

**Blade Nzimande, General Secretary**

### **The SACP's approach to women's emancipation and gender equality**

We have sought to reflect on the above issues, primarily as an entry point to understand the critical challenges facing the struggle for women's emancipation and gender equality, as we once more, celebrate August as South Africa's women's month.

With the mass struggles of the 1970s and 80s, especially the growth of a working-class women's movement at the time, the SACP's perspectives and struggles began to broaden to concretely incorporate gender inequality as the third key contradiction in South African society. The SACP, and indeed our entire liberation movement, has come to understand the national democratic revolution as the struggle to address and overcome the national, class and gender contradictions in their inter-relationship.

The above means that the struggle for women's emancipation cannot be understood outside of its relationship to the national and class struggles. A one-sided emphasis on gender without understanding the national content (whose principal feature is primarily, but not exclusively, race) of these gender struggles is bound to lose sight of the vast differences and opportunities between black and white women. Similarly an exclusive focus on gender at the expense of its class content is likely to privilege the interests of elite black women at the direct expense, if not on the back of, poor working class black women. In other words, whilst the struggle for gender equality seeks to liberate all women from the yoke of patriarchal oppression, we must not lose sight of the racial and class stratification amongst women themselves. This means that we need to constantly build the capacity of African working class women as part of the leading motive forces in the struggle for the emancipation of women as a whole.

Incidentally, yet very important, it is absolutely essential that as we fight for women's emancipation and against all forms of patriarchy, we must also fight against all forms of chauvinism, including African chauvinism and narrow African nationalism. This struggle must be waged both within the progressive women's movement, within our own broader liberation movement and in South African society as a whole.

It is also important to understand that the relationship between these three contradictions is not static, but changes in different historical periods. Post 1994, whilst there has been a slight narrowing of class differentiation between blacks and whites, there has been a widening of the class gulf within the black communities. There also has been a widening class gap amongst black women, brought about by the simultaneous advancement of black women into senior positions AND the impact of retrenchments and casualisation amongst black working class women.

### **Communist women to the front: Concrete women's struggles under concrete conditions**

The SACP's specific contribution to this year's women's month and beyond must be guided by our current struggles to mitigate the impact of the current global capitalist economic crisis, as black working class women constitute the most vulnerable layer of South African society. It is black working class women who are first to be retrenched, casualised and outsourced as the recession bites.

Through our red forums that are currently underway, it is of utmost importance that the struggles of black working class women are placed at the fore, and to

ensure that we deepen black working class women organization as the primary platform for waging the struggle for women's emancipation and gender equality.

The tasks of the SACP therefore is to ensure that all our cadres, especially women communist cadres, need to continue to play a prominent and leading role in current women's struggles, as the only guarantor that the interests of black working class women are at the forefront of consolidating and deepening the struggle against patriarchy.

A key challenge is that of organising women where they are, around the daily things that they do, as casualised labour, as domestic workers, as members of school governing bodies, as church-goers, etc. This requires the strengthening of old platforms of struggle as well as new ones. The SACP also needs to build on the advances made by the YCL the majority of whose membership is young black women.

The SACP also has to intensify its engagement with the government's gender machinery, especially the task of its revitalisation with the establishment of new Women's Ministry. This year's women's month come in the wake of a serious meltdown of the Commission for Gender Equality, and the proposal to merge it with the Human Rights Commission. This requires an active engagement with such incorporation in order to ensure that gender issues are simply not buried in a larger commission. At the same time the SACP must actively engage with the emerging perspectives, programmes and priorities from the Women's Ministry.

It is for the above reason that the SACP's Politbureau has tasked the Central Committee's Gender and Social Transformation Commission to urgently engage with the challenges, new realities and opportunities provided by the establishment of a women's ministry.

**Asikhulume!!!**

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**1 August 2007**

## **Fighting patriarchy and building a progressive women's movement is part of our Medium Term Vision (MTV)**

**Blade Nzimande, General Secretary**

Fighting patriarchy and building a progressive women's movement is part of our Medium Term Vision (MTV)

This past weekend the SACP celebrated its 86th anniversary, with the national event held at the University of Limpopo, and with a number of local celebrations in a number of our districts and branches. We celebrated our anniversary under our 12th Congress theme "Communists to the Front to Build a Better, Socialist World".

We used our anniversary celebrations to report back on some of the key resolutions from our highly successful 12th Congress. We are a confident Party with a clear political programme for the next five years. We have committed ourselves to lead a struggle to build working class hegemony in the whole of society, with priority given to the state, the economy, the workplace, the communities, ideologically and through deepening international solidarity.

It is within this context that we seek to wage struggles in society to address the national, class and gender contradictions, including our approach to women's struggles in South Africa.

August is South Africa's Women's Month, with August 9 as National Women's Day. The SACP has taken a decision that as from this year, whilst continuing to support and actively participate in government-led celebrations and programmes, we shall in addition encourage our districts to hold SACP month long activities during the women's month. This decision is guided by the fact that women's month activities must not be left to government alone, but our own political formations must drive these activities. Mass mobilization and campaigns are necessary in deepening progressive women's struggles in society.

According to the SACP, the fundamental challenge during this women's month is to take forward the task of building a progressive women's movement (PWM) in our country. It is a year since this movement was launched in Bloemfontein. We note

with satisfaction progress that has been made in launching some of the provincial structures of the PWM.

However the SACP is concerned that there is still no visible, dynamic and active programme to drive the building of this movement. Building the PWM should not be a dry bureaucratic exercise of launching structures outside of a concrete programme of action. The task and challenge for the SACP is however not to whinge, but to actively take up concrete issues around the building of the PWM, as part of speeding up the process of launching PWM structures in all the nine provinces.

Building a PWM must be located within the framework of our MTV. In other words the task of building working class hegemony in society must be driven through the mobilization of especially working class women to be central participants in this task. For example, seeking to build working class power in the state must centrally involve building the power of working class women in state structures and through struggles to challenge the clearly patriarchal character of the state. This challenge is also important in giving content to the struggles for 50/50 representation in the state. It is not adequate to count 50% women say in a legislature, outside of a concrete programme to confront patriarchy in such an institution.

As the SACP we have consistently and correctly argued that 50/50 devoid of its class content can only lead to the affirmation of an elite layer of women, without consideration to the needs and aspirations of working class women.

Similarly, our argument for a developmental state, now strongly affirmed by the ANC Policy Conference, must find concrete expression in placing the needs of working class women at the centre of such a developmental state. Our guide should be that there can be no developmental state in the midst of patriarchy.

The SACP will use its activities to celebrate the women`s month as a platform to start implementing some of the resolutions that we have adopted at our 12th Congress. Our Congress has resolved to mobilize our structures to fight patriarchy at all levels of society as the main platform through which to empower women and intensify struggles for gender equality. Our Congress resolution on patriarchy commits the SACP to:

"Strongly engage patriarchal ideas, attitudes and practices

"To educate women and men on the negative impact of patriarchy

"To advance progressive gender theory and practice with the SACP and society to challenge patriarchal relations

"To campaign against gender based violence

"To develop policy and campaigns to socialize unpaid reproductive labour  
"To challenge unequal gender relations in society, including involvement of women in community decision making"

The SACP Congress further correctly observed that the bedrock of patriarchy in South Africa is colonialism of a special type, and that this system was built upon the exploitation of the unpaid labour of women. It is women who also bore most of the social brunt of the migrant labour system, and their sweat was the foundation upon which the superexploitation of the black working class was built. It is therefore impossible to transform the persisting colonial character of our economy, without placing the question of the unpaid labour of women at the centre of building working class hegemony in the economy.

Therefore we expect all our structures, especially at district levels to use this Women`s month to popularize our resolutions and to engage our communities on how together we can implement these resolutions. It is also going to be important to intensify our Know Your Neighbourhood Campaign, to focus on particular problems facing women in our communities.

Our campaigns should from now onwards much more strongly factor the struggle against patriarchy. In other words we need to commit ourselves to ensuring that all forms of patriarchal practices are eliminated in for instance the lending practices of the banks, in the insurance regime in our country, and all other forms of discrimination that women still suffer in our financial sector in general.

Similarly the struggle for land and agrarian transformation must focus on the fight against the prevalent gender inequalities in land ownership and redistribution, including the struggle to eliminate patriarchal practices in allocation and inheritance of land titles. Much as many of our laws have, on paper, eliminated these forms of discrimination, but in practice patriarchy is still deeply entrenched in matters relating to land issues.

The SACP therefore calls upon all its structures to convene gender forums during this August month to popularize our campaigns and engage our communities and the working class in particular on the centrality of the struggle against patriarchy in our daily struggles. These gender forums must also critically engage with what concrete struggles we need to wage together with our communities to fight gender-based violence especially that directed against the girl-child.

The SACP structures must also use these gender forums to concretely evaluate progress in building a working class-led progressive women`s movement, including

additional tasks and challenges in this regard, as well as how to root such a movement in our communities daily struggles on the ground.

Indeed women's month must also be used to intensify our struggle against the HIV/AIDS pandemic. Patriarchy is perhaps the single biggest contributor to the spread of the HIV/AIDS pandemic. Patriarchy is the principal cause and motor for gender inequalities in sexual relations thus making women more vulnerable to HIV infection.

These activities should however not be restricted to the women's month. Rather we should use this year's women's month to launch these activities as part of the ongoing activities of the SACP. It is this that we can bring to bear in not just building the PWM, but a working class led progressive women's movement.

**Asikhulume!!**

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2 August 2006

## **Communist Activism and the Building of a Progressive Women's Movement: Celebrating 50 years of the historic 9 August 1956 Women's March**

**By Blade Nzimande, General Secretary**

The weekend of 29-30 July 2006 marked the culmination of the SACP's month-long 85th anniversary celebrations. The highlight of our anniversary activities were the Red Saturday demand for a once-off amnesty for all that are blacklisted by the faceless Credit Bureaux, the holding of our anniversary gala dinner, addressed by the Minister of Public Enterprises, Cde Alec Erwin, and the holding of the national rally in Pietermaritzburg.

The anniversary rally was attended by close to 15 000 people, drawn in the main from Pietermaritzburg and its surroundings, but also attended by hundreds of our comrades from other provinces. The rally was preceded by intense communist mobilisation, including blitzing with pamphlets, loud hailing in local communities, household visits, and face to face contact with many people of our people in and around Pietermaritzburg. The mobilisation was done in line with the proud traditions of communist organisation in our country. It is this type of organisation and mobilisation that has seen the huge successes of our campaigns and the growing membership and support for the SACP amongst millions of our people.

The communist mobilisation capacity we have witnessed in the last few weeks must be maintained, and directed towards taking forward our many campaigns towards the launch of our 2006 Red October Campaign. Most importantly this mobilisation capacity must immediately be directed towards effective participation in the women's month during this August, which is South Africa's women's month.

### **Wathint'abafazi, wathint'imbokodo: Celebrating the 1956 historic Women's March**

The SACP will be joining millions of women, and indeed all South Africans, in the celebration of the historic Women's March of 1956 next week. Through this event we truly need to honour all the pioneers of the more than a century old women's struggles in South Africa, against colonialism, apartheid, women's oppression and



class exploitation. However most critically we need to use this occasion to recommit ourselves to the organisation and mobilisation of South African women from all walks of life, especially women workers and the poor.

The 9 August 2006 celebrations will see the culmination of work that has been done by many progressive women's and political organisations towards the establishment of a progressive women's movement in our country. The SACP fully supports and has thrown its full weight behind the formation of such a movement. As we have pointed in our earlier editions of this publication, the SACP is firmly of the view that a progressive women's movement is of absolute necessity in consolidating and advancing the national democratic revolution.

The SACP's approach to the building of a progressive women's movement is guided by our strategic slogan, Socialism is the future, build it now. From the standpoint of the SACP the building of the women's movement must be part of building capacity for, momentum towards, and elements of, SOCIALISM. The complete emancipation of women must be seen as an integral component of the struggle for socialism, and this is the only basis for consolidating and safeguarding the national democratic revolution. Our strategic perspectives derive from our belief that the main content of the national democratic revolution in the current phase is that of building working class power in all centres of influence and power to address the interrelated challenges of resolving the national, gender and class contradictions in South African society.

The SACP is also firmly of the view that much as these contradictions are, and should not, be collapsed into each other, none can be effectively addressed in isolation from the others. It is also our belief that much as the struggle for gender equality should be waged by women and men, the gender content of our revolution cannot be effectively addressed unless we have a strong, working-class led progressive women's movement at the head of such a struggle.

### **Build a progressive women's organisation from below! Specific role and tasks of the SACP**

Communist women have had a long and heroic contribution and role in South African women's struggles. From the late 1920's communist women like Ray Alexander and Josie Mpama argued for, and consistently and actively participated in, directing some of the energies of the Party towards women's organisation in the national liberation struggle and in the struggle for socialism. In addition, someone like Ray Alexander truly played a pioneering role in consistently raising, and struggling for, placing the question of women organisation as a priority in building a progressive trade union movement.

In the 1940's, Dora Tamana, a communist woman from Cape Town, also played an important role in the mobilisation of women in poor communities around co-operatives and in the building of crèches to look after the children of poor working women.

Again, women communists like Florence Matomela, Josie Mpama and Ray Alexander played a crucial role in the formation and struggles of the Federation of South African Women in the 1950s. All these women communists firmly believed that organisation of women must be a bottom up process, especially driven through the organisation of working class and poor women. The SACP needs to build on this rich legacy, by ensuring that working class and poor rural women become the bedrock of a progressive women's movement.

Whilst the SACP accepts the logic and necessity to build a progressive women's movement that unite women across classes, working class women must be at the head of such a movement if it is to effectively respond to the challenges of the true emancipation of women. Failure to stamp the authority of working class women in such a movement can only lead to the hijacking of this movement by elitist and BEE-type interests, thus reproducing and exacerbating the very widening class inequalities in broader South African society. We must struggle against the 'BEE-isation' of the women's movement!

If the working class, in alliance with the landless rural poor, is indeed the leading motive force of our revolution, this must find strong resonance within a progressive women's movement. Asserting working class leadership is not something achieved through resolutions and boardroom type discussions, but through concrete struggles that energetically take up issues affecting women workers and poor women. It is only by placing the interests of the working class at the centre of a progressive women's movement that women's unity can be cemented. This does not mean ignoring the interests of professional and other middle class women, but these have to be subjected to the leadership of working class women.

The progressive women's movement must be an activist movement, and the SACP is well placed to connect its own activism and campaigns to the building of a women's movement. The SACP is concerned that the very necessary efforts that have been put into the building of a progressive women's movement have been somehow pursued bureaucratically, and not driven by grassroots campaigns and activism. We hope that the Launch Conference of the women's movement, scheduled for 5-8 August 2006, will lay a strong foundation towards addressing this deficiency.

The necessity for working class leadership is also underlined by the fact that there is a growing and disproportionate influence of the middle classes and the bourgeoisie, both black and white, on some of our economic policies and gender perspectives. Currently the more prominent discourses on gender equality and women emancipation are those addressing issues of women from the standpoint of narrow BEE, and elite-driven affirmative action.

In order to achieve the goal of building a women's movement from below, it is important that the SACP use the platform of its own campaigns (financial sector transformation, building co-operatives, land and agrarian transformation, etc) to organise women and bring their perspectives to bear on the women's movement as a whole. These campaigns have already mobilised hundreds of thousands of ordinary women, in stokvels, in burial societies, in the church societies and other co-operative and grassroots socio-economic activities. The only consistent platform for building a progressive women's movement is by taking up issues that daily confront women, especially working class and poor women.

The SACP also has a specific responsibility to bring to bear its own ideological perspectives into this movement. This should be done through a consistent Marxist-Leninist analyses of women's and gender struggles, including sustained political education and cadre development programmes, especially for working class women.

It is also important for the SACP to consistently point out that we should not make the mistake of thinking that women are already not organised in various activities to advance their own interests. The challenge is how to harness these into a progressive women's movement.

As part of its contribution to this effort, and in celebration of the heroic struggles of the women of 1956, the SACP will be convening district women and gender forums during the month of August 2006, to plan its own strategies for building a working class led progressive women's movement.

**We shall keep the Red Flag flying, with and for the ordinary women of our country and the world!**

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15 February 2006

# **The urgency of building a working-class led, progressive women's movement**

**By Blade Nzimande, General Secretary**

This year our country will be celebrating the 50th anniversary of the 1956 Women's March. The SACP will be joining millions of women of our country, and indeed all South Africans, in celebrating and honouring those women heroes who participated in that historic march.

However we have been concerned as the SACP that in honouring our historic events, we tend to reduce these to ceremonial, often only government-led, occasions divorced from a programmatic approach to advance the goals associated with such events. In addition when celebrating these events our own formations, which have led the struggle for liberation for decades, play an insignificant role. This by no means suggest that our democratic state should not honour these events, but that the movement must be central in the mobilisation of our people to appropriately celebrate these milestones of our revolution. We are raising this matter now, so that it is not reduced to an 'August 9' once-off celebration, but must be used as an opportunity to reflect on progress made and challenges ahead. We of course expect the ANC Women's League to play a leading role in this regard.

The ANC and its allies have for more than a decade been debating and emphasising the importance of building a progressive women's movement. During the constitutional negotiations in the early 1990s, this call coalesced into the formation of the National Women's National Coalition (WNC). This body played an important and significant role in ensuring, amongst its most important achievements, the inclusion of progressive clauses on women and gender equality into our national constitution. It was also a crucial platform for dialogue amongst women, drawn from different political and social formations in our country.

However we need to honestly reflect on some of the weakness of the Coalition since then. The form that it took was perhaps necessary for its time, but it has now significantly declined, such that its only existence is as part of the Community Constituency at NEDLAC, with no clear linkages to mobilised, progressive women's constituencies. Perhaps its strength (of bringing together women from all walks of

life) was also its weakness; it sought to be everything to everyone. Because of its character and social composition it largely became a platform for formalistic lobbying with no active mobilisational basis.

The SACP is of the view that while it is essential to build a broad front of women's organisation, such an objective will not be attained unless we build a vibrant, working class-led, progressive women's movement.

Since the 1994 democratic breakthrough women in our country have indeed notched important victories and advances, most significantly in the constitution and some of the ANC government policies to advance the interests of women in society. Women also now occupy key positions and play an important role in the reconstruction and development of our country. These are important gains given the long struggle to try and place women's emancipation at the centre of our historically partriarchal organisations.

### **A brief overview of women's and gender struggles in South Africa's revolution**

Much as the struggle for women's emancipation (as distinct from the struggle for transformation of gender relations) has always been a component of the national liberation struggle and our perspectives on socialism, it is a truism that it was not until the 1980s that the liberation movement and our Party begun to firmly incorporate these into our programmes and perspectives. However until then, the major debates and strategic calculations of the Party and the liberation movement principally revolved around the relationship between the national and class struggles in the national democratic revolution.

The lack of a strategic and programmatic focus on the question of women in our major strategic and programmatic perspectives is illustrated for instance by only one single reference to the ANC Women's League in "Fifty Fighting Years", and the same with reference to FEDSAW. It was not until the 1980s that the question of women's emancipation and gender struggles began to feature more prominently in the programmes of our movement. Even the Freedom Charter, progressive as it is, never really said much about the struggle for women's emancipation and struggles for gender equality.

The reason for this was largely because of the patriarchal nature of our society, which our own organisations inherited, and not due to an absence of women's struggles in the liberation struggle as a whole. This reality led to a much later development of comprehensive gender perspectives within our movement.

Indeed a proper history of the women's struggles in the South Africa's liberation struggle still remains to be properly written and recorded. Women's struggles are as old as the national liberation itself since 1910. But it is a struggle that for a long time tended to take a back seat in key strategic considerations of our movement. For instance women were only admitted as full members of the ANC in 1943, some 31 years after the formation of the ANC. The situation was however different with the SACP which had always had women as full members right from its inception.

According to Hilda Bernstein, women burst onto the scene in 1913 in a campaign against the carrying of passes in Bloemfontein, though Ginwala points to some earlier forms of women's organisation prior to the establishment of the Union of South Africa in 1910.. During the same year, Charlotte Maxeke led the formation of the earliest political organisation of African women, the Bantu Women's League, regarded as the forerunner to the ANC Women's League. These women's struggles deepened in the Free State and led to co-operation amongst coloured and African women, leading to the formation in 1913 of the Native and Coloured Women's Association.

With the huge influx into the black townships in the 1940s also saw the intensification of women's struggle, leading to the revival of the ANC Women's Section in 1941, which laid the basis for the admission of women as full members in the ANC in 1943. The 1940s were years of intensified activism on the political and economic front, with the SACP playing a leading role in many of these struggles. It was during this period that women communist leaders like Dora Tamana in Cape Town were involved in building co-operatives, the squatter movement and crèches to look after the children of working women. Other heroic struggles by women included the struggles against the beer halls, the most intense being in Cato Manor in Durban.

The launch of the ANC Defiance Campaign in 1952 also gave further impetus to women's struggles, culminating in the historic August 9 1956 Women's March to Pretoria.

### **A gender perspective based on our South African realities**

However throughout these struggles the gender perspective was less articulated and these struggles were largely seen in terms of supporting the working men and husbands. The 1980s began to advance very clear gender content to the women's struggles, primarily led by the democratic movement inside the country, culminating in the important Malibongwe Women's Conference in Paris which consolidated the gender perspectives that were to inform much of post 1994 gender struggles, policies and legislation by the democratic government.

We have correctly argued in our movement that women's and gender struggles, though closely interlinked, are not identical. The struggle for gender transformation must be a struggle involving both women and men, but such a struggle can only be enhanced if there is strong progressive women's organisation at the centre.

Like many other communist parties, whilst the SACP progressively came to incorporate gender as one of the fundamental contradictions in the national democratic revolution and the struggle for socialism, for a long time it believed that the victory of socialism over capitalism will automatically resolve the gender contradiction. However, the growing influence of feminist perspectives gradually merging with perspectives of women's emancipation of the national liberation movement, led to a much deeper appreciation, at least in the strategic perspectives of the SACP, of the complexities of the gender contradiction in the national democratic revolution.

Our 10th Congress programme provides what is perhaps the most advanced theorisation of the centrality of the gender contradiction in our revolution. It notes that:

"Marxism developed on the foundations (and as a critique) of classical bourgeois economics. In its heyday...bourgeois economics focused upon production and, therefore, on labour. It was this focus that was central to Marxism as well. The focus was not wrong, but it led to a tendency to down-play the critical reproductive side of economies, and societies at large. This, in turn, led to a neglect of the fact that capitalist profit maximisation is based not just on exploitative production relations, but critically on oppressive reproductive power relations. ...The focus on production obscured the central economic and social role played by 'non-economic' activity in the reproduction of society – the rearing of children, caring for the sick and elderly, house-hold management, and shopping. Much of this work is borne by women, and the failure to adequately account for it has led to an historical blindness around gender oppression in many socialist and communist formations...The SACP believes that a key task in taking forward, developing and renewing the socialist project requires a much greater theoretical and practical attention to reproductive labour, and it is here that much of the intersection between class and gender oppression is to be found."

In the last two years the Party has begun, both in practical struggle and in theory, to take forward these issues raised in the 10th Congress. While the theorisation from the 10th Congress quoted above remains entirely valid, it is a theorisation that could apply equally to a developed, first world capitalist economy and to a society like our own, characterised by deeply entrenched and racialised underdevelopment

and polarisation. In our practical campaigns (co-ops, land and agricultural reform, financial sector transformation) we have been forced to consider whether the economic zone of the so-called “second” economy is essentially a zone of “reproductive” activity. Our conclusions are increasingly that social and economic activities in this zone may well be reproductive from the perspective of capitalism (they play the role of “cheaply” providing a range of services (usually unpaid) that reproduce labour-power for capitalist production - from minibus transport, to stokvel savings, to street vendor meals that the “formal” capitalist market is failing to address). But from the perspective of the working class these activities might well be considered as also incorporating actual or embryonic forms of production (and not reproduction) of use-values for working people and the poor.

What we are also discovering (we have always known this, without necessarily being thoughtful about it) is that large numbers of working class women are often in the forefront of these “second” economy social and economic activities – on the land, in own account petty entrepreneurship, in stokvels, in social caring activities. These practical and developing theoretical perspectives of the Party are an important area in which we can take forward our theorisation of the connection between gender struggles and the class and national struggles. It is also an important area (it is not the sole area) in which the centrality of women in the struggle for a different kind of society (based on production for social need – i.e. socialism) is high-lighted.

### **Key sites and struggles in building a working class-led, progressive women’s movement**

In the SACP’s electoral message in support of an overwhelming ANC victory in the forthcoming local government elections, we have welcomed the decision by the ANC that half of all its municipal councillors must be women. This is one of the most important steps towards full women’s emancipation and a decisive advance towards gender equality in the public sphere.

However we are concerned that this decision has been made without adequate political work on the ground to engage Alliance formations on the reasons for this decision and how this is to be done.

It is also important that this 50/50 representation must not simply be reduced to women bodies in local councils or gender political correctness. This should be accompanied by a clear programme of what these women councillors should do once elected. In addition, much as the struggle for gender equality is equally the responsibility of women and men, gender transformation cannot be achieved unless women are at the head of this struggle. Therefore for the SACP equal



representation of women should also be accompanied by a conscious strategy to build a progressive women's movement and a clear programme to place women's issues and gender equality at the centre of local government transformation and that the struggle for gender equality is at the centre of the Integrated Development Plans (IDPs).

What the above seeks to underline is that building a progressive women's movement perhaps require more intensified sectoral mobilisation of women, in the spheres in which they are located, leading activities for sustainable livelihoods and transformation, in the workplace, in residents' associations, in stokvels, in school governing bodies, and so on.

Another key sectoral site of mobilisation needs to be led by the trade union movement. The high and deepening levels of casualisation in our economy has produced a large layer of young working class women, especially in the commercial and catering sectors, many of whom are not organised into the progressive trade union movement.

Despite the many strides made by our women especially post- 1994, the SACP is concerned that this struggle seems to be increasingly co-opted by an elitist agenda. This agenda is underpinned and fuelled by the increasing dominance of narrow and elitist conceptions of affirmative action and black economic empowerment in our society. The struggle for women's emancipation is, to put it differently, increasingly being 'BEE'd'. It is for this reason that our media is dominated mainly by glossy magazines of top women, and about the advancement of women in senior managerial ranks and those cutting BEE deals in the capitalist economy.

In the process, the struggles of ordinary working class and poor women in both the urban and rural areas tend to take a back-seat. The heroic and exemplary struggles of these women, in the trade unions, in the stokvels, in burial societies, in street trading, and the progress or otherwise these women are making, do not feature in much of the public discourse.

As a result of the increasing elitist co-option of the progressive women's agenda, the discourses and perspectives on many issues fundamental to women (abuse, rape, exploitation, discrimination, etc) are increasingly being dominated by 'liberal' and 'post-modernist' perspectives that do not adequately reflect the concerns of ordinary working and poor women. Where these concerns are raised within these elitist and liberal perspectives, they tend to be patronising towards ordinary women, and approached in a manner that their plight can only be addressed by middle class women 'activists', 'delivered from above', but not led by the working class and poor women themselves.

It is for these reasons that the SACP has a special role to play in building a working class-led progressive women's movement. In addition the SACP has a unique role to play in fostering and seeking to hegemonise Marxist perspectives into contemporary debates and programmes for emancipation of women.

In a way a progressive movement is already being built in the daily collective struggle of ordinary women, but it remains fragmented and requires conscious co-ordination and strengthening. A fundamental challenge is that of strengthening and harmonising the work of the different alliance components to achieve these objectives, especially for the ANC Women's League, the SACP's Gender and Social Transformation Commission, and the COSATU Gender Desk to take a lead in this regard.

There can no better year to earnestly accelerate the building of a progressive women's movement than during the year of the 50th anniversary of the historic Women's March.

**Asikhulume!**

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